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Author(s): John A. Gutowski

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THE PROTOFESTIVAL: LOCAL GUIDE TO AMERICAN FOLK BEHAVIOR

John A. Gutowski

Accounts of American community behavior often describe unusual, singular events through which local groups strive for extra-community or national recognition by placing their private traditions on public display. Such events typically reveal communal celebration, dramatization, and promulgation of a locally significant event, belief, tale, or legend that through the accretion of hoax and organized media activity engenders both broad social and economic participation within the community, and regional or national interest from the outside. In all cases these events represent departures from normal community behavior patterns: periods of joy, celebration, and excess, commonly associated with the concept of festivity.[1] In some cases behavior associated with the extraordinary event later becomes the thematic source or actual prototype for annually institutionalized community festivals. In other cases folk symbols, folk naming practices, and other collective representations of community identity perpetuate the festival's commemorative function. Thus the term protofestival seems an apt designation for this widely recurrent yet underresearched phenomenon.

Evidence of events suggesting the protofestival pattern can be found throughout the United States. In Nantucket, Massachusetts, local tradition about a sea serpent which was reported as early as the 1830s led to renewed sightings in 1937, stories of armadas hunting the monster, and footprint discoveries by local businessmen. The community invited representatives of the press, radio, and newsreels for the event of the serpent's capture, only to discover that the creature was an inflated rubber balloon procured from Macy's department store.[2] In the same year, Newport, Arkansas, population 4,546, staged a community feed for visitors who paid twenty-five cents admission to enter the fenced area

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where the White River monster had been seen. The local newspaper reported the first monster stories; the news services followed. The Chamber of Commerce hired a diver to harpoon "the big gray thing."[3] In Nebraska a tradition about a monster in Alkali Lake led to newspaper hoaxes in 1923 about a prehistoric dinosaur which ate calves and flattened cornfields. The town planned to drag the lake to capture the beast, and charge admission to spectators. But when local landowners asked too much money and too high a percentage of the exhibition fees, the matter died. However, the newspapers reported a mermaid found frozen in the lake.[4]

A "Devil Man" appeared in Algiers, Louisiana in 1938. This supernatural being, which flew through the air wrecking bars and homes, and insulting women, appeared to be the creation of local saloon keepers. As crowds of people, some with guns and rifles, flocked to town local proprietors began advertising that the Devil Man frequented their establishments. Word of a satanic visitation to a beer parlor was said to have doubled business and packed the place with patrons eager to participate in the excitement.[5]

Ware, Massachusetts, known as "Alligator Town" since 1922, features a baseball team and business places named after the celebrated alligator. It derives its claim to fame from local tradition, newspaper reports, and sworn testimonies of citizens and posse members who hunted in vain for an alligator which had been sighted in the area.[6] Similarly, Douglas, Wyoming, proclaims its identity and encourages tourism through a beastly collective representation called the jackalope. This imaginary creature of tall tale tradition has the body of a jackrabbit and the antlers of a deer. Invented in 1934 by a skilled taxidermist and thereafter exhibited in the town hotel, the jackalope remains a major local enterprise. The Douglas Chamber of Commerce issues jackalope hunting licenses; highway signs warn motorists to watch out for the jackalope; local shops do considerable business in novelty items such as canned jackalope milk and jackalope postcards. The local significance of this community symbol can be measured by the eight-foot tall jackalope statue that stands at the center of Douglas' business district.[7]

Though none of these protofestivals grew into festivals, similar events did in Cordova, Alaska; Perry, New York; Rhinelander, Wisconsin; and Willow Creek, California. Cordova now holds an annual Ice Worm Festival in commemoration of a local newspaperman's boast about the exoticism of Alaska's howling wilderness. Tall tale postcards featured bearded miners withdrawing ice worms from glaciers, and saloon advertisements of ice worm cocktails. They were part of the initial protofestive community reaction to newspaper hoaxes which detailed the stentorian

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chirping of these remarkable creatures, spawned on Alaskan glaciers during an unusually frigid winter.[8]

Perry, New York has celebrated a Silver Lake Sea Serpent Festival since 1952, yet its origins extend back to the events of 1855 when the monster, inspired by an Indian legend and a newsman's hoax, became a community symbol. At that time large crowds visited the lake attempting to see and capture the widely reported sixty-foot lake serpent. Two years later the creature, with its canvas, coils, and pumping system, was discovered within the charred ruins of Walker's Hotel. The local pandemonium had been instigated by the hotel proprietor with press collusion in order to increase hotel business.[9]

The Hodag Festival in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, grew out of a community hoax. A local naturalist planted both the story and a replica of a prehistoric, dinosaur-like beast in a Rhinelander pit. He led a group of hunters to capture the monster and then travelled the Wisconsin fair circuit displaying his find. When outside scientists and zoo officials came to investigate, the hoax was exposed, but a stuffed "hodag" was put on display in Rhinelander. Along with tall tale postcards, doctored photographs, and various other artistic representations, it can be observed at the Hodag Festival.[10]

Giant-sized man-like creatures are legendary throughout the world; the best known are the Himalayan Yeti or Abominable Snowman, the British Columbian Sasquatch, and the Californian Bigfoot. Hunted by individuals, groups, and communities throughout the United States, Bigfoot is most energetically pursued in Northern California, Oregon, and Washington.[11] In Willow Creek, California, the creature is institutionalized. The town, population 1,000, is the scene of Bigfoot acitivity and advertises itself as the "Gateway to Bigfoot Country." A huge Bigfoot statue, carved from the trunk of a California redwood, greets visitors at the town's western limit. Within the town, Bigfoot postcards and statuettes are available. In addition, there is entertainment at the Bigfoot Dance Club and the Bigfoot Country Club. The festival held annually on Labor Day weekend is entitled "Bigfoot Daze."[12]

The American protofestival, like its festival counterpart, is both local peculiarity and national commonplace. It is widely distributed throughout the United States, firmly rooted in American life, understandably connected with mass culture, yet ultimately dependent upon the traditional resources and creative talents within particular communities. Thus the protofestival is a synthesis of folk and popular tradition, local and national culture, and so provides a useful guide for examining the creation and

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maintenance of American folklore in a modern local context. Unfortunately, full accounts of the protofestival, attentive to both its folkloric and American patterning, do not appear in the scattered bits and pieces of available information. What follows is an attempt to describe and to interpret a local protofestival as a guide to national folk behavior.[13]

The events described in this report take place in Churubusco, Indiana, population 1,528, located fifteen miles northwest of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Churubusco is a typically Midwestern main street town. In the 1920s it would have compared favorably to the Gopher Prairie of American fiction; in the 1940s it would have appeared much like the Plainville of American social science. By the sixties and seventies, like many a small town in mass society, it assumed characteristics which researchers ascribe to "fringe communities" and "bedroom suburbs." Historically, Churubusco's grain elevators, railroad depot, and main street businesses allowed it to function as a market town for farms in open country neighborhoods. Currently, it can be viewed as a small rural communications center gradually assuming a secondary role within a larger urban-industrial, metropolitan region. Churubusco's people, a mixture of Yankee, German, and Scots-Irish ethnic stock are mostly Methodist, or else Lutheran, Baptist, Nazarene, or Roman Catholic. They tend to downplay ethnic, religious, or class differences, and regard themselves basically as Americans.

Since 1950 Churubuscoans annually observe Turtle Days, a four-day celebration that follows the general pattern of the American community festival. Turtle days features a parade, carnival, raffle, pony-pulling contest, agricultural and industrial display, live entertainment, and feast. The highlights of the festival involve turtle races, selection of a turtle queen, consumption of turtle soup and turtle burgers, construction of turtle floats and costumes, and creation and display of turtle art objects. The newspaper recapitulates the legend of Oscar the turtle which is further discussed and debated throughout town. Like other American festivals, Turtle Days is commemorative. Through its turtle theme it recalls the events of 1949 when Churubusco earned its claim to fame, when Churubusco became "Turtletown USA," when its great protofestival took place.

These events that concerned the town and the nation revolved around a man's quest for a remarkable mythical monster. The man was Gale Harris, former factory worker turned farmer, to this day locally reputed to be a good Nazarene Christian who does not drink, smoke, or lie. The monster was Oscar the turtle, the "beast of 'Busco," the largest fresh water inland snapping turtle believed to have ever been seen by man. According to both testimony and tradition it "had a shell as big as an old fashioned dining room table" and weighed from four hundred to five

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hundred pounds. The encounter between man and monster occurred on Fulk Lake located on the Harris farm just outside of Churubusco.

Upon first sighting of the beast while shingling his barn roof, Harris immediately began investigating and searching for a creature whose existence had been rumored for fifty years. A few farmers and conservation club members soon joined Harris, patrolling the lake in rowboats in a hunting-fishing expedition for the legendary animal. Two weeks later the mass media seized the day. The first newspaper to print the story was the *Columbia City Post-Mail.* On 7 March 1949, this rival town paper headlined: "Five Hundred Pound Turtle Would Make Lots of Good Turtle Soup."

> Ever see a five hundred pound turtle?
> Ever see a water weasel?
> Residents of Eel River Township, Allen County, have located a 1949 model turtle said to be as big as a car top, a dining room table top or a ten man poker table. The huge tortoise has caused a mild sensation around Churubusco since it was seen in a small five acre lake located on the Fulk farm two miles northeast of Churubusco near state road 205.
>
> Reports have it that a turtling concern from Cincinnati, Ohio has placed a top price of $1800 on the animal, dead or alive. The reptile has been variously described by native residents as "too big to go through a door," "as thick as a sack of clover seed," and "a head as big as a man's."
>
> Yesterday prospectors probed the lake's edge with twenty foot fish poles and lowered cages made of chicken wire, but the turtle refused to budge from his muck rest on Sunday. The turtling concern warned the workers not to try to lift the turtle by its shell since the shell would probably tear loose under the weight of the body.
>
> One character brought an animal known as a water weasel in his coat pocket to locate the turtle, but the water weasel merely took a dip in the water and came up smiling like a motorist looking for a drinking fountain in Death Valley.
>
> One bystander said, "If Campbell's Soup Company could catch this animal, they could remove 'mock' from their turtle soup label."

A United Press International correspondent in Fort Wayne noticed the story, determined that it had general appeal, and sent it out on the

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national wire service. Soon the Churubusco turtle tale appeared in newspapers from Boston to Los Angeles. Lowell Thomas added to the national coverage with a network radio broadcast on 10 March. Even Jack Armstrong was heard to speculate about the "beast of 'Busco." Reporters from all corners swarmed into Churubusco.

Now required to perform before a national audience, Harris rose to the occasion. Along with both his local volunteers and his unforeseen outside helpers, Harris staged a relentless ten month quest for the turtle, attempting its capture with an arsenal of turtle trapping gadgets: harpoons, shark hooks, dragging hooks, home-made chicken wire and rope nets, home-made underwater viewing apparati, centrifugal pumps, tractors, cranes, and beams. He also received the assistance of deep sea divers, aviators, commercial fishermen, professional turtle trappers from Tennessee, zoo officials from Chicago and Cincinnati, naturalists from Indiana University, and representatives of the mass media. The quest was fraught with difficulty. Whenever Harris sensed victory, he would find that his elusive prey had burst through a fence rail corral, or torn through the fishing nets, or upset the rowboat from which the farmer had grabbed the turtle's tail. Throughout the ordeal Harris suffered continuous near-tragic mishaps: an automobile accident that occurred while en route to the lake, near death by drowning on two occasions, eyestrain so severe that he incurred temporary blindness, and finally an attack of appendicitis.

In a final act of desperation Harris decided to empty the lake. Upset by press charges that he was merely a publicity seeker, Harris fulfilled an early vow: "If I have to drain that lake dry to prove I'm telling the truth, I'll do it." He attached a pipe and hoses to a centrifugal pump and to his tractor, readied a lifting beam and crane on lakeside, then began pumping the lake water into a drainage ditch. After sixty days of continuous pumping, the seven acre lake was reduced to the size of a swimming hole. Exhausted from the nonstop lake depletion process and requiring but one more day to remove the remaining water and then locate the turtle at the lowest point of the lake bed, Harris returned home for rest and thereupon sustained the appendicitis attack. While Harris recuperated from a serious appendectomy, the rains came, the dams broke, and the machinery submerged. Harris then gave up the chase because of physical, spiritual, and financial debilitation.

The narrative outlined above represents matters of both verifiable historical record and significant local oral tradition. Manifestations of folklore in the events of 1949, however, encompass much more than Harris' dramatic quest for the "beast of 'Busco." These developments exist in a variety of forms and contexts, and provide further illustration

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of the symbiosis and hybridization of folk and popular culture in America. For what Harris and associates were doing at Fulk Lake and what the media was reporting were necessarily intertwined. The media had granted a personal, local, and community activity a public domain and a national audience. Media presence, invited and welcomed by individuals and the group, appeared to intensify and extend rather than diminish the behavior. Having read the latest newspapers and listened to current radio broadcasts, the average Churubuscoan either took off for the lake or hurried downtown to talk, to mingle, to joke, to participate in the happenings. The result was the performance of traditional folklore itself and the generation of a nascent body of source materials, ideas, attitudes, events, and art forms from which subsequent traditions would evolve.

The significant folk behavior at Fulk Lake comprises two broad phenomena: first, the hunting-fishing expedition, which is a personal, ritualized folk behavior whose techniques and knowledge derive from group wisdom; and second, the transformation of this folk pastime into a more public, more complex social event, a celebration akin to the festival.

Local tradition had long established Fulk Lake as a place of mystery and hazard. Many a child was cautioned to stay away from the place because of some unknown danger. This reputation, combined with communal knowledge of the lake's prodigious wildlife, made Fulk Lake a special challenge for the sportsman and the destination of many a fishing trip regardless of the legendary turtle. Consider, for instance, John Fulk's remarks about ice fishing at Fulk Lake.

> And we was always cautioned to stay off of that lake in the winter because there was thin places on that ice. I fished on it, but you never knew when you was gonna break through it. Now the guys that fished it and watched it; they knew where those currents seemed to be.

In considering the folklife bases for the 1949 turtle quest, a number of factors warrant consideration. First, before he actually saw it, Harris became aware of the existence of huge turtle in Fulk Lake as a result of his brother-in-law's experience while engaged in a ritual fishing expedition on his own birthday. Second, even though thousands of spectators crowded the lakeshore, the actual hunting was an intensely personal, in-group affair limited to Harris and a small number of local farmers and conservation club members, people who had social ties with one another. Third, even though some outsiders, promoters, and professionals were enlisted at one time or another, they quickly departed once their institutional

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and professional functions were either completed or frustrated. They were unable to sustain interest in what was essentially a folk pastime. Finally, although the use of diving suits, airplanes, helicopters, commercial fishing nets, cranes, tractors, and centrifugal pumps bore no connection with a hunter's traditional tools, the invention and use of home-made traps, harpoons, dragging hooks, and periscopes—equally incongruous for a traditional hunting-fishing expedition—reflected the self-sufficiency and improvisational character of folk culture. A purist may not regard Harris' contraptions as traditional folk cultural tools; yet insofar as they represent improvisations from the givens of both environment and circumstance, constructed for personal use, they should qualify as folk inventions.

The influx of spectators, the introduction of non-traditional methods and machinery, and the media presence may have contaminated the pristine folk event, but the end result was not the submergence of folk life but its transformation into a larger folk event. Socially exclusive hunting-fishing became embryonic public festival. Because media exposure ascertained hunting-fishing's uniqueness in terms of both objective and method, and because media provided public awareness of a traditionally non-public interaction, local individuals responded to the situation in the same manner as they would react to traditionally defined unique events such as barn raising, hog butchering, county fair, or a fire. They came to see what was happening, to lend a hand, to rub elbows with friends and neighbors, and to find out what was new. The special event became cause for socializing. I met few people who were living in this area at the time who did not attend the Fulk Lake festivities. John Fulk described the activities quite well.

> There was spectators comin' there that set there just as sober as if you'd be settin' there in church. They took it all in. And I was the kind that just didn't believe in it. And I had a lot of fun. I was there, I suppose, twenty-five times, day and night, Sundays.
>
> And I had a great-uncle about eighty-four years old. He went right with me. We both had a lot of fun. And he was born on the east bank of the lake . . . .
>
> Now my dad was just sixteen years younger than this uncle that was goin' with me, and he never went down there. He was mad about it 'cause he owned land on both sides of the road, and he couldn't get his cattle back and to for traffic and he was mad.

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> But the day the diver went to go in the lake, of course, we come home and said, "There's gonna be a diver tomorrow." Well, he went down . . . . Of course he wanted to see a diver. He wanted to see a diver's suit. That was it. That's what I went for. I never seen a diver—didn't know what for a suit and outfit he had. And that was what a hundred percent of us was there for. You know, that was somethin' new. And I wanted to see that trap that they had.

Seeds of the same festive strain were simultaneously germinating downtown where community identification of Oscar the Turtle with Churubusco was taking place. As filling stations sold out all their gas, soda fountains did continuous rush-hour business, and the telephone switchboard overloaded, the reptilian collective identity took form. Souvenir turtles were sold out of every store. The clothing shop reported all but two turtle neck sweaters out of stock. One restaurant sold more turtle soup in two days than it had sold in a year, after advertising "Beast of 'Busco" turtle soup on its windows. Other signs appeared as advertisements in shop windows and in the newspapers.

Free Turtle Soup Tomorrow	*Walker's Lunch*
Turtle Tire Sale	*Raypole's Garage*
A Rifle For the Best Guess As to Oscar's Weight	*Leitch's Hardware*
Oscar . . . . The Busco Monster How Much Does He Weigh? How Many Inches Across His Shell? Zenith Table Model Radio . . . . 1st Prize	*Churubusco Lumber Co.*
Turtle Steak	*Leitch's Market*
Free Gallon of Ice Cream To the Person Who Guesses The Weight of Our Turtle to the Nearest ½ Ounce. Winner Will Be Named Saturday, April 2. (Those who helped us weigh the Turtle Wednesday are Ineligible)	*Hodges' Dairy and Market*

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The Life Expectancy of Turtles May Be Measured in Centuries . . . . We Weren't Around to Help the Beast of Busco plan his estate, but we are here to help you . . . . Although you may not have a life expectancy of centuries we can help you make your paltry three score and ten years more secure.	*Isay Insurance*
In Churubusco it's Oscar when you speak of turtles or Real Estate . . . . One Oscar eats dirt, the other sells it. I'm the one who sells it.	*Oscar Isay Realtor*
Turtle Soup With Turtle Tales Free Nothing like relief from worldly worries to pep man up. Come in soon for a bowl of piping hot turtle soup—and hear the latest of turtle stories.	*Green Grill Cafe*
Turtleburgers? Turtle Steak? Not yet. Not until they catch the big turtle in Fulk Lake. Until then come in and try some of our good home cooking and swap turtle yarns with us.	*Pat's Cafe*

During this period the local post office received letters addressed to "Turtletown," "Home of the Big Turtle," and "Turtlebusco." The newspaper received a letter addressed, "*The Horrible Truth,* Turtle City." So intense was both local activity and national recognition that the *Truth* would write, "And Churubusco which was once just another small town with an unpronounceable name is now on every tongue."

The events of 1949 sparked the local imagination into fits of imaginative and creative tales, jokes, and personal experience stories as excited talk proliferated all around. A sampling of some early tall tales has been

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preserved in the pages of the *Churubusco Truth*. In its three initial "Turtle Editions," considerable space is devoted to retelling currently circulating windies.

> Dub Pressler says that with a turtle so big in such a small lake Gale ought to sell water by the bucketfull as turtle soup.
>
> Sid Freeman says that the turtle is so big that the lake probably will be reduced to a small puddle when the turtle is removed—the way the water in the bath tub goes down when a fat person steps out of the tub.
>
> Frank Flowers Jr. declares that when the turtle was frozen in the ice this winter, it tried to walk to the bank and in doing so moved the whole lake about twenty feet.
>
> Ralph Shanabarger says the turtle, when he swims in the lake, pushes so much water ahead of him that he kicks up dust from the bottom with his hind legs.
>
> Others say that Jake Jones, who formerly owned the farm, now knows what happened to the black Angus cattle that used to turn up missing and why a fence erected between the cattle and the lake stopped the loss.[14]

A second series has fewer tales, but manifests an increased artistic elaboration of detail.

> Charlie Horner, the butcher, says that when a mule was used in an attempt to pull the "Fulk Lake monster" from the water, the turtle pulled the mule into the lake—ate him—and came out of the water picking his teeth with a single tree.
>
> Pat Isay said that the turtle was on dry land . . . Someone dropped a package of chewing tobacco in the lake. Old Br'er Turtle took a big chew, stuck his head out of the water to spit juice over Eel River Township, and then drank the lake dry trying to get the taste out of his mouth.
>
> Dub Pressler says he used to climb onto the shell of the 'Busco Beast and the turtle would take him where the bluegills were biting. The turtle had the last word, however. Dub always put his bait in the turtle's mouth. The turtle retaliated by spitting out the limit.[15]

A third series of only two tales shifts theme from tales of lying to tales about liars, specifically the liars in Churubusco.

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> A travelling salesman of our acquaintance, on hearing of the fabulous turtle, remarked that most towns have a liar or two. However, he's never before seen a town (Churubusco) where EVERYONE in it were liars—that coming from a man from New Haven!
>
> When two ministers from Kalamazoo stopped at the Harris farm for a turtle chat, Gale Harris told them that he was surprised that they, as preachers, would be interested in the turtle, since so many lies had circulated about old Oscar. The ministers replied that they figured Churubusco, because of the numbers of liars, would be a pretty good spot in which to set up business.[16]

Churubuscoans also sang new songs and wrote new poems, odes, and ballads now that they had an "objective correlative" for local pride and community identity. According to the *Truth*, 17 March 1949, the first of these artistic endeavors occurred on 14 March at the local Farm Bureau meeting where a ladies quartet composed of Mrs. Ted Green, Mrs. Paul Fry, Mrs. George LaRue and Mrs. Esli Shively sang a new version of the popular song, "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain." Mrs. Green had added six new verses describing the expected celebrations when Oscar would be taken from Fulk Lake, and retitled the song, "She'll Be Comin' From the Lake."

A typical illustration of local artistry appeared in the *Truth* on 21 April. Hanna H. Hyndman authored this composition which, like a traditional broadside ballad, reports details of a stirring newsworthy event.

The Turtle Ballad

Churubusco's on the map now
With a monster in Fulk Lake
And if he stays too lively
All the traps and nets will break
The business men of our town
Spent much time for their sake,
To get that enormous turtle
Out and above the lake
He got into their trap one day;
They pulled him to the shore.
All at once he jerked and splashed
And then was seen no more.

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Some worked from morn to night for days
To prove their story true
For they had seen him in the trap
That broke and had gone through.
The papers spread the news around,
And cars there came in number.
Telephones began to ring
But Oscar slept in slumber.
Our hopes are high and will power strong
To see him out some day,
So that is all that it will take
To make things come our way.[16]

The next piece came from a former Churubusco resident, Ida Mae Barcus, now Mrs. Howard Youse of Greencastle, Indiana. Mrs. Youse mentions that she wrote the poem in 1949 to offer her unorthodox theory concerning the turtle's origins.

Now my mother allows that Oscar's just an ole boat
That's decided to surface, to again try to float.
For my father, so she says, and a barber named Pete,
Used to go to Fulk's Lake to catch fish for to eat.
But the fish didn't bite and so in disgust,
They sank their old tub and left it to rust.
With years of green moss it's decided to rise,
And bobble around underneath the spring skies.
Its efforts, tho futile, scared farmer Harris,
And a "turtle" now lurks, his name to embarrass,
For his traps and contrivances have all been in vain
Hampered by crowds, some ice and the rain.
When his friend and the diver bring the thing to the top,
The guesses and bets are all bound to stop;
For they'll discover it's that mossy ol' boat
That's trying this spring to surface and float.[18]

A last category of imaginative folk behavior intimately associated with the Churubusco protofestival was the hoax. Hoaxes are intentionally created untruths, not honest errors in observation and judgment, which are made to appear as truth through mass media propagation. While media related, the hoaxing in Churubusco involved intense local participation and personal interaction.

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Gale Harris himself played an important role in the local hoaxing, not as perpetrator but as debunker. Although Harris may have been the victim of faulty perception, unbridled imagination, overzealous enthusiasm, or an unkind fate, he certainly was no hoaxer. His first act of debunkery occurred when he publicly removed a giant-sized mock turtle from his lake. The model, constructed from logs, canvas wrapping, and an automobile tire, had been surreptitiously launched by two Churubuscoan aviators who originally were flying their airplane over the lake in hopes of sighting the turtle and assisting Harris. Because of public demand and the prospect of small financial gain the aviators began a Fulk Lake flight service for tourists at twenty-five cents a head. In order to drum up business and to provide their customers with a brief, satisfying, and guaranteed thrill the aviators perpetuated the fakery until Harris, tired of hearing reports inconsistent with his own sightings, righteously deflated the hoax.

In April the *Indianapolis Star* reported that two local youths had captured the "Beast of 'Busco" after driving by Fulk Lake and finding the turtle on its back in a ditch. The two hundred and eight pound monster was on display at a Naptown grocery that had promised to buy everything of unusual size coming from Fulk Lake. Acting quickly Harris queried Indianapolis airline officials and Western Union about arrangements made to transport a Miami, Florida, sea turtle to Indianapolis. Having obtained the confession of an Indianapolis school teacher implicated in the affair, Harris released his evidence to the proper *Star* authorities, and the hoax was summarily shattered.

During November another Churubusco monster turtle was displayed in Fort Wayne in a newly opened sporting goods store operated by Woodrow Rigsby. Rigsby had captured headlines earlier in the year by plunging vainly into Fulk Lake with deep sea diving gear. Rigsby now claimed that his one hundred pound captive had been netted in Blue Lake, west of Churubusco. Harris traveled to Fort Wayne, looked at Rigsby's catch, and declared it an impostor on the grounds that it was too small a specimen to be the real Oscar. Harris further asserted that Rigsby's turtle was not even a Hoosier impostor but rather a Missouri alligator snapping turtle. Two days later Rigsby confessed that he had purchased the beast from an Arkansas zoo for fifty dollars.

Other hoaxes more in keeping with the newspaper tradition of story accompanied by trick photography appeared in Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend, and Syracuse, Indiana, and Bryan, Ohio, papers. These resulted in floods of phone calls to Churubusco, renewed headaches for Harris, and continuous excitement for Churubusco.

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In 1949, the Churubuscoans who were having fun, mingling with crowds, cornering the gossip, renewing old acquaintances, and enjoying new experiences were following, in essence, the behavioral patterns of the festival. The procession of cars to Fulk Lake, the airplane rides over the lake, the hot dog and coffee served on the Harris back porch as well as the turtle fare served downtown were comparable to counterparts in the American festival: parade, carnival attractions, and feasts. Additionally, through tale telling, poetry making, boasting, hawking, and hoaxing, the community had focused the celebration upon a central theme and placed itself, its sources of interest, accomplishment, and notoriety on display. Through institutionalization and yearly commemoration, this theme became a typically American community festival, Turtle Days. In this regard, the term "protofestival" accurately defines the complex events of 1949.

Even if these events had not developed into a festival, the protofestival concept remains useful for categorizing and comparing the Churubusco experience with other similar folklore phenomena. Furthermore, the protofestival concept helps underscore the manner in which a community blends folk behavior with mass media involvement into a distinctly American cultural pattern.

To explain local and national interest and participation in Churubusco's protofestival requires consideration of the American ideas, values, and traditions imbedded within its notable events, especially within the thematically central Harris affair. Essentially Harris' stubborn devotion to duty, his endurance of constant privation and tribulation in search of financial gain through uncommon experience represent an acting out of the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. Thus Americans can find in Harris' behavior the same ideas that motivated Barnum to display his prodigies or oddities and that in fantasy inspired Alger's re-embodied Ash lad to show his pluck and courage.

Harris' contest with the legendary monster, his tenacious, monomaniacal obsession with its capture, and his ultimate failure also bring to mind Ahab's struggle with the white whale in the great American novel. There are obvious differences between fiction and fact, the mystical and the practical, the cosmic and the local, the pagan and the Christian, destruction and capture; yet it is not difficult for an American mind to see something of the indomitable prince of the seas plying the Atlantic astride the Pequod's quarterdeck in the small town Christian farmer patrolling Fulk Lake in his rowboat, both questing for the mythical beast. Essentially what Melville imagined and what Harris performed coincide thematically with a folklore pattern based upon traditional quest

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motifs involving the unique, marvelous, remarkable, and dangerous animal.[19] That this pattern is firmly anchored in American consciousness is obviated by its omnipresence in American tradition on all levels: elite, popular and folk. Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea,* Faulkner's *The Bear,* and other lesser elite compositions[20] perpetuate the pattern into the twentieth century. So does the contemporary parody of *Moby Dick,* Peter Benchley's *Jaws,* which both in paperback and film versions has become a national sensation. The monster movie, witness the 1976 rebirth of the 1933 American classic, *King Kong,* remains a staple of popular American culture.

To avoid overstating the American case, the international provenance and old world origins of these motifs deserve notice. From ancient times the quest for the mythical animal has provided a foundation for the most popular, widely recorded and researched of international folktales—the dragon slayer.[21] Similarly, monster motifs have recurred continuously in world heroic literature such as the confrontation between Theseus and the Minotaur, Heracles and the Hydra, Jason and the Gorgon, Sinbad and the Rukh, Beowulf and Grendel, Sigurd and Fafnir, Lemminkäinen and the elk of Hiisi. Nevertheless, the American tradition does distinguish itself, through its nurturing of mythical animals and their quest, from the nation's beginnings up to the present day. This is especially noticeable in American folk tradition.

During the European era of Reformation and Enlightenment which stressed humanism and rationalism, the colonists who came to the New World found an environment eminently hospitable for perpetuating and elaborating the declining creatures of a European lower mythology. Marvels and prodigies of God, the Devil, and nature circulated freely among common folk, learned churchmen, reputable governors, and literate travellers in a strange new land which could be viewed as a fertile garden or a frightful "howling wilderness."[22]

Dorson's recapitulation of stories, legends, and traveller's tales from early New England printed sources confirms the wide distribution and enormous popularity of monster-prodigy traditions in colonial America. Germane to this study, Dorson traces sea monster traditions from sightings in 1641 through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and can conclude that by the nineteenth century

> The sea serpent fable burgeoned forth into a thousand fragmentary tales. The creature was sighted in many waters, even in inland lakes; his shapes, colors, limbs and movements received detailed description; periodic visits to New England

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> shores brought in their wake flooding rumors, scientific speculations and organized expeditions to effect capture.[23]

By the late nineteenth century sea serpent stories had deluged newspapers as far as the Pacific Northwest. Donald Hines' compendious survey of these sources indicates the popularity of marvels, the supremacy of the sea serpent story and, interestingly enough, a common source for these monsters in the Great Lakes interior region.[24]

With the expanding frontier and its mentality of brag and individualism, the tall tale came into its own, even though it would continue to overlap with the marvelous legend form. It is precisely in those motif categories which govern or relate to the tall tale that Baughman would have to modify Thompson's international *Motif-Index,* in order to accommodate American tradition.[25] Modification was needed for an American pantheon of imaginary creatures such as the Ziphus, Swamp Dodger, Hide Behind, Tripodero, Will-am-alone Dingball, Haggletopelter, Gwinter, and assorted side hill animals and reptiles.[26] American tradition would exaggerate and lie about the enormity of virtually every common creature. Baughman lists motifs concerning monstrous size alone for the ant, dog, bear, squirrel, chipmunk, mouse, rat, rabbit, hog, cow, fish hawk, hummingbird, turkey, gullnipper, tick, bee, potato bug, cockroach, spider, caterpillar, fish, snake, frog, earthworm, tapeworm, and turtle.

The action in Churubusco can thus be viewed as an actualization of an American cultural tendency. The American qualities of the protofestival can be suggested further by comparing the Churubusco complex with its closest international parallel, the Loch Ness monster phenomenon.[27] Like Churubusco, the traditions of the Loch Ness monster originated with traditional beliefs about a lake dwelling monstrous beast. Newspapers popularized the monster's existence in 1933, provoking an international sensation, swarms of tourists, curiosity seekers, hoaxers, and investigators. International interest and speculation continue to this day. However, on the local level community involvement and active participation in the Loch Ness phenomenon pales by comparison to that of Churubusco. Loch Ness has no counterpart to Gale Harris; its heroes have been lakeside watchers and photographers rather than adventurers. The history of the Scottish case is one of sightings rather than quests of capturing images on film rather than grasping the beast by the tail, of concern for the monster's protection from outsiders rather than desire to display the prodigy at public fairs. The Loch Ness communities have scrupulously avoided and indignantly suppressed the public relations

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hoaxes, boisterous boosterism, and carnival atmosphere which characterized Churubusco in 1949. In sum, restraint rather than action differentiates the British from the American pattern.[28]

While content may differ, the protofesitival form apparent in Churubusco has parallels throughout America. The American features in Churubusco's protofestival reveal the way in which a local community relates to the nation through folklore, and the manner in which the community's participation in a national symbolic system influences its collective representations. Though performed in consonance with American folk, popular, and elite traditions, though responsive to national mass media, this protofestival's occurrence depends foremost on oral, personal, and local communication and interaction, the preconditioning of local folk tradition, and the creative accomplishment of community members. Thus the protofestival serves as a worthy guide for the interpretation of American folklore in its broadest, most rewarding national sense.

Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

NOTES

[1] Jospeh Pieper, *In Tune With the World: A Theory of Festivity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965), pp. 3-39. Larry William Danielson, "The Ethnic Festival and Cultural Revivalism in a Small Midwestern Town" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University), 1972, p. 20.

[2] Curtis D. MacDougall, *Hoaxes* (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 256. For additional American serpent related protofestivals see Peter Costello, *In Search of Lake Monsters* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1940), pp. 174-196.

[3] MacDougall, *Hoaxes,* pp. 256-257.

[4] Louise Pound, *Nebraska Folklore* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), pp. 114-116.

[5] Lyle Saxon, et al., *Gumbo Ya Ya, A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), pp. 89-92.

[6] MacDougall, *Hoaxes,* pp. 31-32.

[7] *Indianapolis Star,* 1 December 1977, p. 42.

[8] MacDougall, *Hoaxes,* pp. 16-17. A song, "The Ice Worms," is reported to have been the theme of a Manitoba trapper's festival. See F. C. Beck, "The Ice Worms," *Midwest Folklore* 1 (1951): 98.

[9] Harry S. Douglass, "The Legend of the Serpent," *New York Folklore*

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Quarterly 12 (1956): 36-42.

[10] Luke "Lake Shore" Kearney, *The Hodag* (Wausau, Wisconsin, 1928), pp. 9-17; Robert E. Gard and L. G. Sorden, *Wisconsin Lore* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1962), pp. 256-259.

[11] John Napier, *Bigfoot* (New York: J. Cape, 1972).

[12] Elwood D. Baughmann, *Bigfoot: America's Abominable Snowman* (New York, 1975), pp. 60-62.

[13] For a complete account see John A. Gutowski, "American Folklore and the Modern American Community Festival: A Case Study of Turtle Days In Churubusco, Indiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1977).

[14] *Churubusco Truth,* 10 March 1949.

[15] *Churubusco Truth,* 17 March 1949.

[16] *Churubusco Truth,* 24 March 1949.

[17] *Churubusco Truth,* 21 April 1949.

[18] *Tri County Truth,* 3 March 1960.

[19] Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-1958), motifs H1320 Quest for marvelous objects or animals, H1331 Quest for remarkable animal, H1360 Quest for dangerous animal, and H1154 Capturing animals.

[20] For example, William Humphrey, *Home From the Hill* (New York: Knopf, 1958); Walter Van Tilburg Clark, *The Truth of the Cat* (New York: Random House, 1949).

[21] Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961), Types 300, 303, and 301.

[22] Richard M. Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), Chapters 2 and 4; *American Begins* (New York: Pantheon, 1950), Chapter 2; *American Folklore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), Chapter 1.

[23] Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow,* p. 134.

[24] Donald M. Hines, "Dust Devils in the Great Desert: A Study of the Impress of the Frontier in Traditional Anecdotes of Humor and Exaggeration in Folk Beliefs and in Traditional Speech Gleaned From Some Old Time Weekly Newspapers From the Inland Empire of the Pacific Northwest" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1972), vol. 1, p. 131. The most comprehensive survey of lake monster traditions is Costello's *In Search of Lake Monsters.*

[25] Ernest W. Baughman, *A Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966).

[26] Baughman, Motifs X1370-X1397. Baughman does not refer to the most extensive American bestiary, Henry R. Tryon, *Fearsome Critters* (Cornwall, New York, 1939).

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[27] Published accounts are legion. The most useful and literate survey is Nicholas Witchell, *The Loch Ness Story* (Baltimore Penguin Books, 1975). A good summary can be found also in Costello, *In Search of Lake Monsters,* pp. 1-102.

[28] Enthusiastic American involvement at Loch Ness is reported as early as 1933. Subsequently, most organized probing of the lake with mechanical apparatus, submarine, sonar, and underwater photography has been undertaken through American initiative. See Witchell, *The Loch Ness Story,* pp. 2, 5, 50, 116-120, and 131-133.

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